



## **Negotiations to Begin on Plutonium Finishing Plant Transition**

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Beginning November 1, 2001, the United States Department of Energy (USDOE), and the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) will undertake negotiations on the cleanup and eventual dismantlement of the Plutonium Finishing Plant (PFP) at the Hanford Site. The PFP is one of Hanford's most complex and highest risk projects. The need to begin the cleanup becomes more urgent as the facility, showing its age after 50 years, grows older. These negotiations will establish legally binding cleanup schedules and associated requirements in the Tri-Party Agreement (TPA), the agreement that governs the cleanup of the Hanford Site.

### **Background**

PFP was built in 1949 to process plutonium for use in nuclear weapons. During the Cold War, PFP was the final link in the Hanford Site plutonium production activities. There, plutonium nitrate solutions were purified and converted into solid plutonium metal for shipment to government weapons facilities until 1989. In 1996, the PFP received its shutdown order from DOE Headquarters. An explosion at PFP the following year heightened concerns about conditions at the site and underscored the urgent need to cleanup and dismantle the facility. About 4 metric tons of plutonium in about 17 metric tons of bulk plutonium-bearing materials remains at the plant in a variety of forms such as metals, oxides, liquids, polycubes, and residues. Currently, the main focus at PFP is to safely stabilize and repackage the plutonium, and to conduct planning for the deactivation and dismantling. The current baseline activities and schedule for PFP transition are as follows:

- Stabilize and/or Repackage Nuclear Materials to be performed by Fiscal Year (FY) 2004
- Deactivate and Dismantle Process Support Facilities beginning FY 2002 and ending FY 2016
- Surveillance and Maintenance Phase beginning FY 2017.

### **PFP Transition Negotiations**

The goal of these negotiations is to establish schedules and associated requirements for deactivation and dismantling of the PFP complex. To accomplish this, plutonium bearing material and waste within the plant must be stabilized and packaged for removal. The scope of transition negotiations will include setting timetables for removing the hazardous material in ducting and piping; removing and disposing of PFP chemical remnants; removing tanks, vessels, gloveboxes and other equipment; and deactivating and dismantling the facilities to an agreed upon end state.

## Potential Issues

Potential issues include: how long the clean up will take; the extent of the cleanup; what controls should be in place to protect human health and the environment both during and after the transition; what impacts will PFP transition have on other Hanford projects; and the issue of whether certain materials containing plutonium will be classified as “waste” which is regulated by the state versus “materials” which are regulated by USDOE under the Atomic Energy Act.

## Public Participation

The Tri-Parties are committed to keeping the public informed about the progress of the negotiations and the issues being discussed. To that end, Ecology as the lead regulatory agency, will provide bi-weekly updates on its website at <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/nwp/> and via an email distribution list. At least one negotiation update session will be held during the negotiations to give people an opportunity to discuss the issues directly with the negotiators. Once the agencies agree on a draft change request, it will be sent out for a 45-day public review consistent with the Community Relations Plan. Public meetings will be held if there is sufficient public interest. Ecology’s Laura Cusack and Rick Bond, DOE’s Larry Romine and Jon Yerxa are available to answer questions or to hear your suggestions at any time.

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To sign up for the PFP Negotiation Update Email list contact Mary Ann Wuennecke, Washington State Department of Ecology, at [mwue461@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:mwue461@ecy.wa.gov) or call (509) 736-3036.

*PFP Fact Sheet*

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**Historical Note:** The U.S. Department of Energy's Richland Operations Office manages the Hanford Site in southeastern Washington State. Hanford was established during World War II as part of the top secret Manhattan Project to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons. Weapons material production was halted in the late 1980s. The Hanford Site is now engaged in the world's largest cleanup effort to deal with the legacy of radioactive and hazardous wastes that resulted from the plutonium production era. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Washington State Department of Ecology regulate Hanford's cleanup program under a long-term compliance contract called the Tri-Party Agreement. This agreement sets the framework and timelines on the cleanup work so that Hanford meets environmental standards. Hanford cleanup is focused on three outcomes: restoring the Columbia River Corridor for other uses, transitioning the Central Plateau to long term waste treatment and storage, and preparing for the future.